

Titanic death loss termed unnecessary

WASHINGTON (AP) — The man who discovered the sunken Titanic said Wednesday that another ship, the Californian, was nearer the doomed liner than it claimed during the 1912 disaster and "there is no doubt it could have . . . rescued those people."

Robert Ballard, 43, chief scientist of the U.S.-French team that found the Titanic in 13,000 feet of water about 560 miles from Newfoundland on Sept. 1, said his evidence shows the captain of the Californian, which made no attempt to reach the wreck, "didn't report his position right."

'It's just tragic'

More than 1,500 people died aboard the Titanic; about 700 were rescued, largely because a third ship, the Carpathia, steamed to the scene after the Titanic sank after hitting an iceberg.

Ballard said there "is no doubt that that tragedy needn't have existed . . . The Californian was inside of 10 miles, perhaps as close as 4 miles, and there is no doubt it could have gone in there and rescued those people. It's just tragic."

Passengers aboard the Californian said they saw the Titanic's distress rockets and even its running lights.

Ballard said the Titanic was found after the U.S.-French team concluded that the captain of the Californian, Stanley Lord, misrepresented his position relative to the doomed vessel because of his "vested interests." "The behavior of the Carpathia proved of most importance to us," in finding the wreck, Ballard said. "That skipper was a doggoned good skipper."

Researchers surprised

Ballard released photographs of the Titanic taken by two research vessels, some showing detail, such as unbroken plates and wine bottles.

He said he and his fellow researchers were surprised to find the vessel in essentially one piece, although most of the stern was broken off.

He noted that only the middle two of four smokestacks remained and said he got "the scare of my life" when he bumped one of the stacks with the Argo, one of the remote-control photo vessels. "I don't think the Navy would have been too pleased," if he had crashed the vehicle, but "we just got a little Titanic paint on the Argo."

Ballard disclosed that, after searching the sea-floor time and again with various gear representing "incredible technology," the Titanic was found by "a 25-year-old echo sounder — it could have been done in a fishing boat."